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Some relations between perception, speech and thought; a contribution towards the phenomenology of speech

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CHAPTER VIII: METAPHYSICAL PERSPECTIVES

Introductory

This chapter is an epilogue. It will, accordingly, be comparatively short. The only task we set ourselves is to state a few problems, in a metaphysical perspective.

What we are giving here is not, therefore, a set of conclusions. For one thing, we do not consider metaphysics as fundamentally a conclusive formulation of the results of phenomenological analysis. Moreover, we have now insufficient data to evolve a metaphysical evaluation.

For what we have analysed, as far as speech is concerned, is only the *word*, understood as described in Chapter I. We should need an analysis of what a *sentence* really is and does, if we want to complete our data so as to make the *transitus* to a metaphysical system acceptable. Moreover we should need a more elaborate psychology of the structures of networks of affective associations among meanings and, correlatively to those, of the sound-material involved. There would also have to be a phenomenology of thought less exclusively evolved along lingual data than has been done in the present study. Finally, the *designata*, or referents, of the words would have to be extended so as to include more than only what is also the object of perception. And there are probably other items not falling within the scope of our study, as described in Chapters I and II.

It may be, perhaps, to a certain extent plausible to maintain that metaphysical investigations evince a deeper concern, on the part of the philosopher, with the whole of reality, and with some of its unfathomable secrets, engrossing his mind; a deeper concern, that is, than that prompting the rather preparatory work of the phenomenologist. This concern is, of course, not itself necessarily a metaphysical avocation: it is characteristic of any man rising above the trivial in life and the pedestrian attitude. It is because of this that a phenomenologist may start from a metaphysical problem without being guilty of an *apriori* in the methodical sense. His inspiration may be poles apart from premisses introduced by sleight of hand, as might be done, consciously or unconsciously, by someone wishing to make a point for which he does not have sufficient evidence. What is more, one of the aims of phenomenology should be, as we have suggested before, to put one's inspiration

to the test in so unprejudiced a manner that it will gradually become possible to find out if one's fundamental inspiration *is* in actual fact poles apart from premisses introduced by sleight of hand.

Our own fundamental inspiration was of an outspokenly metaphysical description: it was the wish to fare safely between monism and dualism. It can also be expressed by saying that, though we supposed that there must be elements of truth in what various anthropologies have asserted about man, we could not be satisfied with what has been done so far. This is, of course, metaphysical in the sense that every philosopher realizes he is deeply influenced by the metaphysics he has become familiar with. There is, therefore, in our view no *a priori* involved at all except one's own attitude. And who can maintain that he is so unprejudiced as to be free from it?

Some questions

In spite of the inadequacy (to a metaphysical elaboration) of the material analysed and of the evidence that has presented itself, it is nevertheless possible to present ourselves and the reader with some problems, to the solution of which we do not propose to contribute anything within the scope of this study.

Let us first take speech itself as our central subject. It has become clear, we hope, that speech takes an intermediate place between polar elements, a sort of "half-way position". Some of these positions can be read from our chart at the end of the book. Speech occupies a half-way position between "distance" and "proximity", between transcendence and immanence, between perception and thought, between rationality and irrationality. Other half-way positions, touched upon more or less incidentally in our study are: between body and mind, exteriority and interiority, cognition and lived experience; between sub-conscious and conscious, pre-reflexive and reflexive, antepredicative and predicative, lingual thought and free thought, productivity and reproductivity, immediacy of contact and instrumentality; between past and future, between consciousness and freedom, between intersubjectivity and isolation.

In spite of so many polarities it is unexpectedly easy to determine which of them has been, in our analyses, most fundamental: it is the polarity of "distance" and "proximity". Our view of this polarity, it will be remembered, came up of its own accord as soon as we found that our original working hypothesis of transcendence and immanence as the

fundamental polarity in human existence proved untenable. On the other hand, it will be needless to say that this conviction of ours is not sufficient at all to explain the structural features of the other polarities, notably those not occurring in our chart. Nor is it now our task to attempt such an explanation. We wish only to stress the need for it as a genuinely metaphysical problem.

A second question could be what is the special function in, and influence upon, the totality of human experience of what we called thought (or cognition) at first, narrowed down to rationality in its specific structure afterwards. We already mentioned *animal rationale* as a particularly one-sided definition of man. But, while we wish to pass over the problems affecting a total picture of man for the moment, we may now say that the one-sidedness of rationality is its allegiance to what we have called "distance" ever since Chapter III. What, then, is the metaphysical impact of this "distance"? And would it be true to say that the mistake of a definition like *animal rationale* is precisely that transcendence unjustly takes the place of "distance"? In other words: is the picture of man evoked by this definition too "vertical"? And if that is so, would the addition of "proximity" to this definition (in what form does not now concern us) restore the balance?

A third problem is constituted by perception in connection with speech. Should we not suspect that the role of language has been forgotten in philosophies of perception, as much as the role of perception has, perhaps, been forgotten in the philosophy of language?¹

Another intriguing point is the one presented by the relation between man and things. The interesting feature has shown itself, in our analyses, that the "strangeness" of things is overcome by their being *named*. The name, in other words, remains with the thing itself, is "faithful" to it. But, as we have seen, no sooner does the name withdraw to the sphere of thought, than the words, or terms (for that is what the names have then become), assume a thing-like character *themselves*, thus giving rise to the experiences so well described by Parain. Would it not follow

1. Is there not a total forgetfulness of the half-way position of speech (viz. between knowledge, or thought, and perception) in the doctrine of the *cognitio per conversionem ad phantasmata*? Is there not as much, or even, perhaps, primarily, the problem of a *cognitio per conversionem ad voces*? And, apart from that, seeing that the best interpretation of the *phantasma* of the original adage is, perhaps, what we have called the mental image, would it not follow that a much better formulation of the adage would be to speak of a *cognitio per conversionem ad phantasmata visualia*? Or, if we may leave scholasticism alone for a moment, and return to our first reformulation of the *conversio*, is the *apriori* position of speech with regard to knowledge, forgotten as it has been in Kant's transcendental analysis, sufficiently well recognized (apart from criticism, of course, of non-Kantians) in the philosophies of Vaihinger, Cassirer, and Susanne Langer?

that all that is thing-like intrudes upon our minds as soon as we wish to overcome its "strangeness" altogether?

There is, further, the problem of space and time. It has harassed the minds of philosophers for so many centuries and nowadays, too, it is highly topical. Our analyses open up the question whether the "foreground"- "background" relations, as correlative to our activity in perception and in productivity in speech and thought, might not open up the way to a new determination of space and time as an existential "milieu" of this activity and of this productivity?

A favourite metaphysical topic would, naturally, be the problem of the one and the many. It may have become clear that, when we spoke of the "one" as characteristic of "foreground" and the multiple as characterizing "background", we did not have anything like the problem of Parmenides in mind at all. We were only giving a description in which the "one" as "constituted" by perception evoked its polar opposite of the multiple as characteristic of "background". Nevertheless, seeing that Aristotelian-Thomistic thought explains the multiple by having recourse to matter as principle of individuation, the question arises in how far primary experience is affected by the multiple as by something as much akin to "alienation" as the Aristotelian notion of "matter". In other words: could there be anything in primary experience which, when unjustly translated into metaphysical concepts, gives rise to the gnostic attitude from which the hylomorphic position can hardly be separated?

And what, we ask next, could be the metaphysical impact of the cognitive primacy of the spatial and the visual? It may be answered that they constitute the mundane correlative of the "distance"-features of our knowledge and thought. This would be a metaphysical statement if "distance" is taken as a metaphysical term. But this could only be really helpful if "distance", as well as its polar opposite "proximity" is in some way or other confronted with other major metaphysical notions. Is there not a parallellism with *logos* and *mythos*? Or, at least, should we not begin our investigations here?

And this brings us to a more or less total picture of man, for, whether it can be helped or not, modern philosophy has made the anthropology of body and mind look rather suspicious. What we want nowadays is a picture, free from the sins of dualism. On the other hand, there does not seem to be any philosophy that can do without the distinction of polar elements. Polarities are not generally distrusted nowadays. It will make for communicability of any philosophy to make an honest attempt to reconcile polarity and unity in the existence of man. We have pointed

out that this is best done by considering our existence as it is in actual fact, as developing dynamically. The polarities revealed in this study are tensions. And a tension is between *two*: what we have been after is the *duality* in man, we have tried to find out how this duality is structured; and particularly, how this duality shows itself in speech.

We are of opinion that the basic polarity revealed in our analyses is that of "proximity" and "distance". Though we have analysed the kind of existence that would in principle appeal to any one's experience – so far as we can be sure at all – as "normal", we have not sketched an "ideal" picture of man. In other words: we have neither idealized "proximity" nor depreciated "distance". We never said that the tensions, giving rise to our development as human beings are always in harmony. As we said in one place, if anyone should be inclined to remark that always having to choose (whether consciously or unconsciously) is like having to shift one's position, time and again, from the one sore leg on to the other, that remark would not be wrong. There is no other way. It is not, we think, the phenomenologist's task to describe our existence as he thinks it *ought to be*, but only and exclusively as it *is*. Even the ethical philosopher will have to take this at least for his point of departure.

Could it be that impatience of dualism goes hand in hand, in some cases, with an impatience with the kind of duality we have been sketching? Is it just possible that philosophers pursue a monistic approach out of impatience with the uncertainties in life? If it is true that metaphysicians are apt to present a too conclusive, too definitive picture of man, could an entirely unphilosophical attitude as indicated here be at least in part responsible?

Even apart from the question whether this latter problem still belongs within the province of metaphysics, we do not suggest an answer. For even within the compass of the ambitious program announced by the metaphysical questions we have asked, this would be too daring. If the reader finds himself asking the same questions as we have asked, we shall feel honoured to share with him one of the most fundamental preoccupations man is fated, and privileged, to have.